



## The Right and Wrong Use of Gifts: Contrasting Tongues & Prophecy (1 Corinthians 14:1-19)

- One of the big problems Paul needed to address in the Corinthian church was the application of God's supernatural love to the exercise of spiritual gifts in their ministry. One of the gifts that was particularly singled out as being misused and abused was the gift of languages (tongues).
  - The gift was not building up the body as God intended.
  - The gift was creating confusion and bringing chaos
- Paul compares and contrasts the gift of prophecy (which has a high capacity to edify the body) with the gift of tongues (which was not being used to edify the body). All gifts exist to serve "the common good" (1 Cor. 12:7) and this purpose of mutual edification is repeatedly expressed throughout the chapter (14:3, 4b, 5b, 12, 17, 19 – "instruct", 26).

### ① Gifts need to be constructive, not self-serving (14:1-5)

- Paul begins by giving two imperatives:
  - "*Pursue love*": Chase after the greatest virtue with full effort and intensity. This will keep you focused on others and what they need.
  - "*Desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophecy*": Zealously desire that God's grace gifts will be exercised as they have been designed and prophecy has the ability to proclaim God's edifying Word (1 Pet 2:2).
- Verse 2 reveals the wrong use of the gift of tongues (not designed for personal private benefit) and verse 3 reveals the right use of the gift of prophecy and how it benefits others.
- The gift of languages is a known language not previously learned and designed not to bring personal benefit but benefit to the body (see Acts 2:4-11; 1 Cor. 14:10, 21; this is what love does-1 Cor. 13:5)
  - v. 4 summarizes the wrong and right use of the gifts.
  - v. 5: Paul wishes that all spoke in tongues (if interpreted) and like prophecy would be clearly understood so the church would be edified.

### ② Gifts need to be coherent, not meaningless (14:6-12)

- The gift of languages is profitless unless it can be understood.
  - Truth must be understood to build others up.
  - The "*unbeliever*" or "*ungifted*" will think the church is insane if the gift of languages is not understood.
- Paul presents three examples to show how useless or profitless it is if no one understands the speaking gifts
  - If Paul speaks in tongues, it is only profitable if it is understood like a revelation, knowledge, prophecy, and teaching (v. 6)
  - A "*flute or harp*" needs to "*produce a distinction in the tones*" to recognize the melody (v. 7)
  - A "*bugle*" can't "*produce an indistinct sound*" and expect anyone to know what it means.
- The exercise of the gift of languages must be "*clear*" or else it's like "*speaking into the air*" (v. 9). Every language has "*meaning*" (v. 10), but if you don't know the meaning, it's like speaking as a foreigner ("*barbarian*" - v. 11).

- Again, the point of all gifts is *“to seek to abound for the edification of the church”* (v. 12) and an unknown language does not accomplish this.

### ③ Gifts need to be cerebral, not emotional (14:13-19)

- Four times in this section (v. 14, 15-2x, 19) Paul calls on those with the gift of languages to engage their *“mind”* and four times he recognizes that they are primarily using their *“spirit”* (v. v. 14, 15-3x, 16).
  - The word *“mind”* describes one's thinking or mental reasoning which is needed for understanding.
  - The word *“spirit”* describes one's passion and emotional desire to connect with God
- Paul's point that both the *“spirit”* and the *“mind”* need to be engaged so everyone understands what the Lord is communicating. Otherwise, it will be *“unfruitful”* (v. 14) and no one will be able to respond to the message (like saying *“Amen”* to *“the giving of thanks”* – v. 16) and (as repeatedly stated) *“the other people are not edified”* (v. 17).
- The only way tongues can be a blessing to others is if it gets translated, so Paul communicate two actions:
  - *“Pray”* that you *“may interpret”* (v. 14) so others can be benefited spiritually.
  - Keep perspective on how important it is to use your *“mind”* rather than *“ten thousand words in a tongue”* so that instruction can benefit the body (v. 19).